

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
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R 201820Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8392
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. LL652: N/A
TAGS: PINS, PINT, UK
SUBJECT: VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

REF: A. DUBLIN 2014 B. LONDON 10004

CONGEN BELFAST PREPARED THIS MESSAGE JULY 19.

1. SUMMARY. IN THE PAST THREE WEEKS THE PROVISIONAL IRA CONTINUED ATTACKS ON SECURITY FORCES, ALTHOUGH AT A RELATIVELY LOW LEVEL, AND RETURNED TO "SOFT" TARGETS OF BLAST INCENDIARY BOMBS IN DOWNTOWN BELFAST FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MONTHS. THE ARMY WAS FIERCELY CRITICIZED FOR KILLING AN APPARENTLY INNOCENT YOUTH, AND THE CONFRONTATION CONTINUES BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND REPUBLICAN PRISONERS OVER THE LATTER'S CAMPAIGN TO ACHIEVE POLITICAL STATUS. PERHAPS MOST NOTABLY, THE PROTESTANT ORANGE ORDER'S RITUAL CELEBRATION OF THE ASCENDANCY JULY 12 PASSED WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT INCIDENT. THE OPENING OF THE MARCHING SEASON CAN BE TRICKY. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE PROVISIONAL IRA RAN A NUMBER OF HIT-AND-RUN INCIDENTS.
(1) ARMY EXPERTS DEFUSED TWO 90-POUND MILK CAN BOMBS JULY 3 IN THE CENTRAL PART OF THE PROVINCE, AND THE SAME DAY A YOUNG MAN WAS SHOT IN THE ARM WHEN HE CHASED YOUTHS IN BELFAST WHO HAD STONED HIS CAR. LUCKILY IT WAS A FALSE ALARM WHEN THE SAME DAY SECURITY FORCES

BLOCKED OFF THE STREETS AROUND THE CONGEN TO CHECK OUT HOUSING EXECUTIVE OFFICES.

(2) A FULL-TIME POLICE RESERVIST WAS SHOT DEAD JULY 4 AS HE WAS LEAVING THE POLICE STATION IN CASTLEDERG, A SMALL TOWN A FEW MILES FROM THE WESTERN BORDER.

(3) ON JULY 12 A REMOTE-CONTROLLED BOMB IN A MAN HOLE KILLED A YOUNG PARATROOPER IN CROSSMAGLEN, SOUTH ARMAGH, A FEW MILES FROM THE SOUTHERN BORDER. THE BOMB MAY HAVE BEEN A GOODBYE TO THE FIRST PARATROOP BATTALION' DUE TO LEAVE THESE DAYS AFTER NOT HAVING TAKEN ANY PREVIOUS CASUALTIES IN ITS FOUR-MONTH TOUR.

(4) ALSO IN SOUTH ARMAGH, AT FORKHILL, A DELAYED-ACTION BOMB DESTROYED A HIJACKED CAR AND MANY WINDOWS JULY 14.

(5) AND THE FIRE BOMBERS RETURNED WITH BLAST INCENDIARIES TO DOWNTOWN BELFAST ON A QUIET SUNDAY AFTERNOON JULY 16. THEY DESTROYED SEVERAL OLD BUILDINGS OUTSIDE THE SECURITY BARRIER A QUARTER MILE FROM THE CONGEN. AS IN THE CASE OF THE FEBRUARY 17 LA MON DISASTER, THEIR TIMING WAS BAD: THE POLICE RECEIVED THE BOMB WARNING AS THE FIRST EXPLOSION OCCURED, BUT NO ONE WAS HURT. SINCE LA MON, PIRA HAS USED A FEW BLAST INCENDIARIES AGAINST INFRASTRUCTURE TARGETS IN DOWNTOWN BELFAST. THOSE COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS ARE THE FIRST "SOFT" TARGET LA MON.

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3. ARMY KILLS YOUTH: THE ARMY HAS BEEN CRITICIZED FIERCELY FOR THE JULY 11 KILLING OF A 16-YEAR-OLD CATHOLIC. THE YOUTH'S FATHER HAD REPORTED A WEAPON UNDER A TOMBSTONE IN A NEIGHBORING CEMETERY. THE

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ARMY STAKED OUT THE SITE, AND THE BOY WAS SHOT WHEN HE INEXPLICABLY POKED AROUND THE TOMB. ARMY STATEMENTS WERE CONFUSING, BUT THE ARMY STANDS BY THE JUDGMENT THAT SOLDIERS FIRED ONLY WHEN THE YOUTH TURNED TOWARD THEM WITH AN ARMALITE RIFLE AT THE READY. IN ORDER TO DEFUSE THE SITUATION, THE POLICE QUICKLY ANNOUNCED THAT THE YOUTH AND FAMILY WERE NOT INVOLVED IN TERRORISM.

4. THE FAMILY IS IN MP REV. IAN PAISLEY'S CONSTITU- ,
ENCY, AND PAISLEY REPEATEDLY CALLED UPON THE ARMY TO ADMIT ITS MISTAKE. (WE ALSO WITNESSED AN ANGRY CONFRONTATION BETWEEN HIM AND A SENIOR ARMY OFFICER.) IN A CAREFULLY WORDED STATEMENT, INFLUENTIAL CATHOLIC BISHOP OF DERRY EDWARD DALY REPORTEDLY SPOKE OF A GROWING CONVICTION THAT THE ARMY WAS IMPLEMENTING A "NEW AND EXTREMELY DANGEROUS POLICY" OF COVERT SOLDIERS SHOOTING AND KILLING SUSPECTS ON SIGHT. AND A SENIOR LEADER OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOR PARTY WENT SO FAR AS TO COMPARE THE ARMY WITH THE PROVISIONAL IRA:
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THEY HAVE BECOME "MIRROR-IMAGES OF EACH OTHER" IN ACTING AS JUDGE, JURY AND EXECUTIONER.

5. (COMMENT: THE ISSUE IS DELICATE; SOLDIERS CARRY A "YELLOW CARD" WITH DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS WHEN AND WHEN NOT TO USE FIRE. THE SOLDIER ON THE SPOT-- WHETHER OVERT OR COVERT -- NATURALLY TENDS TO PUT OUT OF ACTION THE MAN ENCOUNTERED WITH A WEAPON OR BOMB IN HAND. WHEN THE SOLDIER CHALLENGES BEFORE SHOOTING, HE RUNS THE RISK HIMSELF OF BEING SHOT OUT OF HAND -- AS HAPPENED ONCE EARLIER THIS YEAR.)

6. PUNISHMENT SHOOTINGS: ONE FORM OF PRIVATE JUSTICE IS KNEE CAPPING. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NI ROY MASON NOTED JULY 10 THERE HAD BEEN 636 CASES OF PUNISHMENT

SHOOTINGS SINCE 1973, INCLUDING THREE KNEE CAPPINGS THE PREVIOUS WEEK. AND THE ISSUE WAS PUBLICIZED DRAMATICALLY WHEN THE "REPUBLICAN NEWS," THE WEEKLY OF THE PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN, PRINTED A STATEMENT FROM THE BELFAST BRIGADE OF PIRA WARNING "ARMED CRIMINAL ELEMENTS" OF A BELFAST HOUSING AREA TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY WITHIN 48 HOURS OR BE SHOT ON SIGHT.

7. PIRA PRESSURE TO ACHIEVE POLITICAL STATUS: THE GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATED AGAIN ITS INTENT TO WITHSTAND PIRA PRESSURE TO RETURN POLITICAL STATUS TO REPUBLICAN PRISONERS. IN THE HOUSE JULY 13 MINISTER OF STATE DON CONCANNON REJECTED THE IDEA OF "GENERAL INTEREST" VISITS BY MPS TO THE MAZE PRISON. SUCH VISITS WOULD INCREASE TENSION IN THE PRISON AND ADD TO THE BURDENS ON THE STAFF. AND THE NI PRISON AUTHORITY JULY 18 ANNOUNCED THAT THE COMPOUNDS HOLDING "SPECIAL STATUS" PRISONERS WERE BEING DEMOLISHED AS THE NUMBER OF SUCH PRISONERS DECREASED. OUT OF THE CURRENT TOTAL OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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2,960 PRISONERS, 652 SPECIAL CATEGORY MEN ARE NOW IN THE MAZE, AND 13 WOMEN IN ARMAGH.

8. OFFICIAL UNIONIST MP REV. ROBERT BRADFORD LAST WEEKEND ANNOUNCED THAT PIRA HAD INTENDED TO LAUNCH A "HOLOCAUST" IN BELFAST'S CRUMLIN ROAD JAIL TO COINCIDE WITH SUNDAY'S BLAST INCENDIARY EXPLOSIONS. IN FACT, GUARDS FOUND A HALF DOZEN PARTIALLY COMPLETED INCENDIARY BOMBS (CASSETTE TYPE) DURING A SURPRISE SEARCH JULY 5, AND LAST SUNDAY SOMEONE SET ALIGHT A QUICK

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BURNING SUBSTANCE IN A TOILET. A FIRE IN A STORAGE
HUT AT THE MAZE PRISON JULY 18 IS STILL UNEXPLAINED.

9. PERHAPS AS AN ATTEMPT TO STOP SMUGGLING OF BOMB
MATERIALS, OR OF NOTES, SOME PROTESTING REPUBLICAN
PRISONERS IN THE MAZE ARE NOW GIVEN A THOROUGH BODY
SEARCH BEFORE A DASTER VISITS. IN ORDER TO AVOID
SUCH "DEGRADATION" PRISONERS MAY REFUSE FURTHER
VISITS.

10. PREVENTIVE DETENTION UNDER ANOTHER NAME: SOME
CRITICS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S EXTRAORDINARY POWERS
AGAINST TERRORISM CHARGE THAT HOLDING TERRORIST SUS-
PECTS WITHOUT BAIL PENDING TRIAL IS DISGUISED INTERN-
MENT, SINCE THE LEGALLY INNOCENT HAVE TO SPEND SUCH A
LONG TIME IN PRISON. NI MINISTER LORD MELCHETT RE-
PORTEDLY TOLD THE LORDS JULY 6 OF GOVERNMENT CONCERN
OVER THE TRIAL BACKLOG, AND THAT AN ATTEMPT WOULD BE
MADE TO ASSIGN MORE JUEGES. MELCHETT SAID THAT IN MAY
1977 AOD A YEAR LATER THE AVERAGE TIME SPENT IN CUS-
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TODY WAS ABOUT 40 WEEKS. FURTHER, OF THE 1,340
AWAITING TRIAL IN MAY 1577, 72 HAD BEEN IN CUSTODY
OVER A YEAR.

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